10/564282

IAP20 Rec'd PCT/PTO 11 JAN 2006

Method for Analysis of Objects in Microlithography

Optical imaging systems can frequently be described as transfer chains with optical transfer behavior that is described by the transfer behavior of the individual elements. The transfer behavior manifests itself in resolution capacity and is generally described by the PSF: point spread function and/or spectrally by the OTF: optical transfer function [1-4].

Normally, the optical transfer behavior of the individual elements is largely determined by the technical limiting conditions and is variable within limits. On the other hand, generally a defined transfer behavior is required for use in measuring technology. If the given limiting conditions are too restrictive, the desired system transfer behavior can no longer be achieved to the required extent. Consequences may include low contrast and low-resolution capacity and the occurrence of imaging errors.

The basic requirement of an AIMS (aerial imaging measurement system) consists of simulating the OTF of a photolithography stepper or scanner as well as possible. A deviation of the OTF leads to errors in the measuring results and their evaluation. Usually, in this case, the first magnification stage is laid out so that its OTF simulates the stepper OTF, while the resolution capacity of the following elements is selected so that it is high enough that there will only be a negligible negative effect on the system OTF. However, in practice the technical and/or financial limiting conditions limit the correlation with the stepper OTF that can be achieved.

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Inventive solution:

The problem described is solved according to the invention in that the output variables of the AIMS system (aerial images) are corrected with respect to the transfer behavior in an additional processing step so that they correspond to the corrected output variables of the image of a photolithography stepper/scanner with the desired system OTF.

In particular, the following are prerequisites of the case,

- that the output variable is a discrete or analog electrical signal or a corresponding digital data set (e.g., the pixel values of a CCD array detector);
- that the desired transfer function (with the OTF: G_{soll}) is already specified by at least one of the transfer elements;
- that the resolution capacity of the interfering elements ($G_{stör}$) is higher than that of the desired corrected system.

According to the invention, the correction consists of a filtering of the output variable, at which the percentage of the interfering transfer elements in the transfer behavior is compensated. Possible technical realizations:

- Electronic circuit (analog or discrete filter)
- Algorithmic correction using software in a digital computer (µC, PC, DSP, etc.)

Basic principle:

In the following, spatially-dependent variables are indicated with lower case letters and their respective Fourier transforms with capital letters. An example that can be named here is the PSF (designation: $g(x,y)$) and its Fourier transform, OTF (designation ($G(f_x,f_y)$)).

If the transfer behavior can be described with adequate approximation by a linear system with N elements, the OTF of the system results as a product of the OTFs of the individual transfer elements and the PSF of the system as a convolution product of the PSFs of the individual elements. Generally, it is true that the OTF is the spectrum of the PSF, i.e., its Fourier transform. Accordingly, with a two-dimensional image, the OTF of the system is:

$$G_{System}(f_x,f_y) = G_1(f_x,f_y) \cdot G_2(f_x,f_y) \cdot \ldots \cdot G_N(f_x,f_y) = G_{Soll}(f_x,f_y) \cdot G_{Stör}(f_x,f_y) \quad (1.1)$$

i.e., $$G_{Stör}(f_x,f_y) = G_2(f_x,f_y) \cdot \ldots \cdot G_N(f_x,f_y)$$

and/or the PSF of the system

$$g_{System}(x,y) = g_1(x,y) * g_2(x,y) * \ldots * g_N(x,y) = g_{Soll}(x,y) * g_{Stör}(x,y)$$

i.e., $$g_{Stör}(x,y) = g_2(x,y) * \ldots * g_N(x,y)$$

where "*" is the convolution operator. Under the condition that

$$G_{Stör}(f_x,f_y) \neq 0 \quad \text{for all} \quad (f_x,f_y), \quad \text{in which} \quad G_{Soll}(f_x,f_y) \neq 0,$$

the correction filter can be specified as

$$G_{Filter}(f_x,f_y) = [G_{Stör}(f_x,f_y)]^{-1} \quad \text{for all } (f_x,f_y) \text{ in which } \quad G_{Stör}(f_x,f_y) \neq 0, \quad \text{and}$$

$$G_{Filter}(f_x,f_y) = c \qquad \text{otherwise,}$$

with c being any constant. Thus, the filtering theoretically supplies:

$$G_{System}(f_x,f_y) \cdot G_{Filter}(f_x,f_y) = G_{Soll}(f_x,f_y)$$

The filtering can also be carried out as a convolution in the local area:

$$g_{System}(x,y) * g_{Filter}(x,y) = g_{Soll}(x,y)$$

with the filter function

$$g_{Filter}(x,y) = FT^{-1}\{ G_{Filter}(f_x,f_y) \}.$$

$FT^{-1}\{\ldots\}$ is the (inverse) Fourier transformation.

In addition to the above mentioned filter function, other functions are also conceivable that do not change the overall transfer behavior, but possibly have better properties, e.g., with respect to noise. Example:

$$G_{Filter}(f_x,f_y) = [G_{Stör}(f_x,f_y)]^{-1} \quad \text{for all } (f_x,f_y) \text{ in which} \quad G_{Soll}(f_x,f_y) \cdot G_{Stör}(f_x,f_y) \neq 0,$$

and

$$G_{Filter}(f_x,f_y) = 0 \quad \text{otherwise.}$$

The procedure described applies analogously for a one-dimensional or multi-dimensional images. Besides that, it is conceivable in principle to select a spectral representation that is not based on the Fourier transformation, e.g., the Z transformation.

In actual imaging systems, the OTF varies more or less over the image area. Variations of this type can be taken into consideration approximately in that the corresponding filter functions are set up for several suitably selected partial ranges and the results of the associated filtering are superimposed with weighting.

Embodiment example:

Figure 1 shows the inventive principle schematically.

The imaging system for an object that is characterized by an object intensity $i_o(x,y)$ consists of N steps $G_1 - G_N$, each of which is characterized by a transfer function.

The image that develops, characterized by a signal distribution s(x,y) is corrected using a correction filter, in that an involution occurs for the steps $G_2 - G_N$ of the imaging system.

The result is a corrected image with an image signal distribution $s_k(x,y)$.

In the following, a system will be described as an embodiment example (see Fig. 2) divided into two imaging steps that correspond to the transfer functions G_1, G_2 in Fig. 1.

The imaging principle (without EUV illumination unit) of a two-step EUV-VIS-AIMS (aerial imaging measurement system) is shown for testing a mask for semiconductor manufacturing. The illumination can occur using incident light, as here with the EUV illumination, but also using transmitted light.

The object (in this case a mask structure) will be imaged on a scintillator using an EUV lens (intermediate image) that converts the EUV wave length into visible light. Using the subsequent VIS optics, the intermediate image is transferred to a CCD camera.

In it $i_0(x,y)$: object intensity

$i_1(x,y)$: output intensity from step 1 (intermediate image)

$s(x,y)$: measured image signal (output variable from step 2)

In the case of the above mentioned AIMS

$$G_{AIMS}(f_x,f_y) = G_{System}(f_x,f_y) = G_1(f_x,f_y) \cdot G_2(f_x,f_y)$$

with

$$G_{Soll}(f_x,f_y) = G_1(f_x,f_y) = G_{Stepper}(f_x,f_y)$$

(Step 1)

and

$$G_{Stör}(f_x,f_y) = G_2(f_x,f_y)$$

(This step 2 can be composed, e.g., of a percentage of the VIS optics and a percentage of the CCD camera).

$G_1(f_x,f_y)$ is the OTF of the first magnification step that is used to simulate the transfer behavior of a stepper. $G_2(f_x,f_y)$ combines the OTF of the following steps, e.g., remagnification step(s), image converter layers, CCD array detector, etc.

The image by step 2 can be represented by a convolution product:

$$s(x,y) = g_2(x,y) * i_1(x,y)$$

Equivalent: the image spectrum $S(f_x,f_y)$ can be represented as a product:

$$S(f_x,f_y) = G_2(f_x,f_y) \cdot I_1(f_x,f_y)$$

In this, $g_2(x,y)$ is the impulse response and $G_2(f_x,f_y)$ is the transfer function from step 2.

The resolution capacity of step 2 is greater than that of step 1.

In other words: the upper limit frequency of step 2 is greater than that of step 1.

This means $|G_2(f_x,f_y)| > 0$ for all points (f_x,f_y) below the upper limit frequency of step 1 (possibly with the exception of individual points (f_x,f_y) in which $|G_2(f_x,f_y)| = 0$ (?))

$g_2(x,y)$ or $G_2(f_x,f_y)$ are adequately known numerically, whether by measurement or calculation on the basis of the device parameters.

According to the invention, the intensity $i_1(x,y)$ will be reconstructed from $s(x,y)$.

Examples for determining the transfer function of systems

- Concrete computational example: for an ideal, i.e., image-error-free, incoherent image with circular aperture, the distribution of the radiation intensity in the image plane $s(x,y)$ results by convolution of the radiation intensity distribution in the object plane $i_0(x,y)$ and the standardized spot obliteration function g_i:

$$g_i(x,y) = \left[\frac{2 \cdot J_1(\frac{\pi \cdot NA \cdot r}{\lambda})}{\frac{\pi \cdot NA \cdot r}{\lambda}} \right]^2 \quad \text{, where} \quad r = \sqrt{x^2 + y^2}$$

(NA: numerical aperture λ: wave length J_1: first-order Bessel function)

The associated OTF G1 of this ideal incoherent image,

$$G_i(f_x,f_y) = \begin{cases} \frac{2}{\pi}\left[\arccos\left(\frac{\lambda \cdot \rho}{2NA}\right) - \frac{\lambda \cdot \rho}{2NA}\sqrt{1-\left(\frac{\lambda \cdot \rho}{2NA}\right)^2} \right] & \text{for} \quad |\rho| \leq 2NA/\lambda \\ 0 & \text{for} \quad |\rho| > 2NA/\lambda \end{cases},$$

$$\text{with} \qquad \rho = \sqrt{f_x^2 + f_y^2}$$

Thus, the correction filter of an ideal incoherent image results as

$G_{Filter}(f_x,f_y) = [G_i(f_x,f_y)]^{-1}$ for all (f_x,f_y) in which $G_i(f_x,f_y) \neq 0$, and

$G_{Filter}(f_x,f_y) = 0$ otherwise.

Image errors can be detected, e.g., by multiplication of the incoherent OTF with a phase term $e^{i\phi(fx,fy)}$.

In the literatures [3-5], calculations for other systems, e.g., the ideal incoherent image with rectangular aperture, image converter layers, CCD camera arrays, multi-channel plates, etc., are known.

- Various methods were developed for measuring the transfer function, see e.g., [3-8]. It should be noted that the transfer function of a system or partial system depends e.g., on the wave length and the numerical aperture. Either the transfer function can be measured for all the system settings used or the transfer function of one (or more) system setting(s) can be extrapolated to other system settings.

Solution: compensation of the impulse response $g_2(x,y)$

- Mathematical implementation:
  - Compensation in the spectral range:
    1. Fourier transformation: $S(f_x,f_y) = F\{s(x,y)\}$
    2. Division by $G_2(f_x,f_y)$: $S'(f_x,f_y) = S(f_x,f_y) / G_2(f_x,f_y)$
    3. Reverse transformation: $s_k(x,y) = F^{-1}\{S'(f_x,f_y)\}$

  An unfolding in the local area is also possible using an iterative algorithm.
- Under consideration of a magnification M at step 2, the coordinate values i_1 change to i_1'

$$i_2(x,y) = g_2(x,y) * i_1'(x,y), \qquad \text{with} \qquad i_1'(x,y) = i_1(x/M,y/M)$$

and/or

$$I_2(f_x,f_y) = G_2(f_x,f_y) \cdot I_1'(f_x,f_y), \qquad \text{with} \qquad I_1'(f_x,f_y) = |M| \cdot I_1(M\cdot f_x, M\cdot f_y)$$

(Fourier transformation)

- Step 2 itself is to be seen as a combined system.
- Step 2 must necessarily contain a wave-optical partial system. In the simplest case, it consists only of the detector (CCD array, or the like).

- Mathematically, the imaging by step 2 behaves analogously to an incoherent optical image, in which the initial intensity occurs due to convolution of the inherent intensity with the PSF.

Example: Compensation of the impulse response $g_2(x,y)$ by correction with a calculated filter (see Figures 3-5).

- Figure 3 shows the calculated cross section of an object structure intensity $i_0(x,y)$ (3 lines with a width in nm and distance in nm) as a function of the location, as well as the associated image intensities of the first image step $i_1(x,y)$, of the overall system $s(x,y)$ and of the corrected system $s_k(x,y)$, whereby the following image parameters were used: wave length, numerical aperture, signal. An ideal VIS lens was assumed as the interfering element (second image stage). In Figure 4, it can be seen clearly that the intensities of the first imaging step (target) correlate very well with the intensities of the corrected system.
- Figure 4 shows the absolute-value spectra, associated with Figure 4, of the OTF of the first imaging step $G_1(f_x,f_y)$, of the second imaging step $G_2(f_x,f_y)$, of the overall system $G_{AIMS}(f_x,f_y) = G_1(f_x,f_y) \bullet G_2(f_x,f_y)$ and of the corrected system $G_k(f_x,f_y)$. It can be clearly seen here, as well, that the absolute-value spectrum of the OTF of the first imaging step (target) correlates very well with that of the corrected system.
- Figure 5 shows the absolute value spectrum, associated with Figures 4 and 5, of the correction filter $G_{Filter}(f_x,f_y) = 1/G_2(f_x,f_y)$.

Advantages of the invention:

1.) Lower resolution capacity adequate for subsequent interfering elements, e.g.,

- Smaller numerical aperture of the VIS optics of the above mentioned embodiment example or
- Larger wave length of the VIS optics of the above mentioned embodiment example adequate
- With the EUV/VIS solution, no index adaptation between scintillator and VIS optics (see also [10 + 11]) is necessary in order to emulate the stepper imaging using AIMS.

2.) Simpler technical implementation and thus more cost-effective.

3.) CCD with higher pixels or binning can be used => lower noise with shorter time => higher throughput due to shorter illumination time

4.) Overall magnification can be selected lower => higher throughput due to larger image field

Patent claims:

1.

Method for analysis of objects in microlithography, preferably of masks, by means of an aerial image measurement system (AIMS) that consists of at least two imaging steps, whereby the detected image is corrected with respect to the transfer behavior of the second or other imaging steps by means of a correction filter.

2.

Method according to Claim 1, whereby the illumination of the object occurs with incident and/or transmitted light.

3.

Method according to one of the preceding claims, whereby the correction is carried out in such a way that the corrected output variables of the image correspond to a photolithography stepper or scanner.

4.

Method according to one of the preceding claims, whereby the correction is carried out by an involution.

5.

Method according to one of the preceding claims, whereby measured correction values are used for the correction.

6.

Method according to one of the preceding claims, whereby calculated correction values are used for the correction.

7.

Method according to one of the preceding claims, whereby the correction is carried out using an electronic circuit by means of an analog or digital filter or an algorithmic correction by means of software in a digital computer.

8.

AIMS system for carrying out the method according to one of the preceding claims, with at least the following components:

a) a first imaging step consisting of:

- EUV imaging optics with mirrors, especially *Schwarzschild lens, especially spherical or aspherical*

and/or

EUV imaging optics with zone plates

and/or

X-ray imaging optics with mirrors, especially *Schwarzschild lens, especially spherical or aspherical*

and/or

X-ray imaging optics with zone plates

and/or

UV imaging optics with diffractive optics (lenses, beam splitters, prisms, grids, etc.)

And

b) at least one second imaging step consisting of

UV imaging optics with diffractive optics (lenses, beam splitters, prisms, grids, etc.)

and/or

VIS imaging optics with diffractive optics (lenses, beam splitters, prisms, grids, etc.)

and/or

electron microscope (PEEM photoelectron microscope)

and/or

image converter consisting of

EUV/VIS scintillator

and/or

EUV/UV scintillator

and/or

X-ray/VIS scintillator

and/or

X-ray/UV scintillator

and/or

UV/VIS scintillator

and/or

photocathode: conversion of photons (X-ray, EUV, UV) into electrons

and/or

fiber optics

and/or

camera

and/or

microlens array on camera or scintillator

and/or

amplifier elements (multi-channel plate)